

Submitted by: Lisa Thomas, Coventry, CT
Support for H.B. 5262

Dear GAE Committee Co-Chairs Sen. Flexer and Rep. Fox, Vice Chairs Sen. Haskell and Rep. Thomas, and Members of the GAE Committee:

My name is Lisa Thomas. I live in Coventry, part of Connecticut's "Quiet Corner". One thing we are learning in our corner is to speak up. I support H.B. 5262 because it provides greater access to voting for residents throughout the state, including in my mostly rural northeastern corner. Voting is the most important right we exercise as Americans and we must do everything possible to ensure that citizens can exercise that right.

Having run for and been elected to municipal leadership multiple times, I have had ongoing opportunities to speak with voters about their needs and to learn not only what they like, but what they don't like. The vast majority of voters definitely don't like restrictions on their access to the ballot! This was clearly shown in the 2020 election cycle polling conducted by the CT Office of the Secretary of the State. It was also evidenced by voters' choices across political parties in November 2020 when over a half million of us chose to vote by absentee ballot.

Over and over my constituents tell me about the challenges they, their friends, or their loved ones face when trying to get to their polling station on Election Day. We are an economically distressed region and many residents hold 2 or more jobs in order to make ends meet. Constituents express confusion over what excuses "count" in order to vote via absentee ballot. Often, that confusion and fear of repercussion leads to them not applying for an absentee ballot and worse - not even voting! The accommodations in H.B. 5262 make voting more accessible for workers who may lose wages by taking time to vote, are unable to get time off from work to vote, or who commute long distances in or out of state, and must leave home before the polls open, and cannot return in time to vote.

Voting continues to be very present in the minds of the thousands of voters I spoke with during the 2021 election cycle. The pandemic really made them pause to consider the limitations that continue to exist in our state, especially when they hear reporting on so many other states that provide greater ballot access. One of the most frequent concerns they express is with access to voting. Concern is especially prevalent in the more rural parts of our Quiet Corner. Voters are thrilled to have the opportunity to vote by no-excuse absentee ballot. They feel that the process of obtaining an absentee ballot and then returning their ballot to a drop box or via USPS is seamless and convenient.

I urge you to support this bill and move it forward.

Thank you for your consideration,

Lisa Thomas
Coventry CT

